



What is giardiasis disease?

Giardia is a parasite that causes an infectious disease called giardiasis which affects the stomach and bowels. *Giardia* is a common cause of diarrhea in the United States.

Who is at risk for giardiasis?

People of all ages can become infected with giardiasis.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

The most common symptoms are diarrhea, foul-smelling soft stools, abdominal cramps, bloating, increased gas, and weakness, loss of appetite and weight loss.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardiasis usually appear seven to 10 days (but sometimes as long as four weeks) after the germs are swallowed. The symptoms may come and go for weeks in a person who is not treated.

How is giardiasis spread?

The parasites must be swallowed to cause disease. You can get a *Giardia* infection if you swallow food or water that has been contaminated with the parasite. The parasites multiply in the small intestine and are passed out with bowel movements.

Giardiasis is often spread when people do not wash their hands with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper. People who get the germs on their hands can infect themselves by eating or touching their mouths. They also can spread the germs to things they touch, including food, which can then make others sick. The *Giardia* parasites are mainly spread from person-to-person, such as in day-care centers and institutions where personal hygiene may be poor due to age (infancy, elderly) or disability. Giardiasis also can be spread this way in a household setting.

Also, *Giardia* parasites have been found in the stools of many animals, including rodents, dogs, cats, cattle and wild animals. Animals living near water supplies, such as beavers and muskrats, have been found to be infected with *Giardia*. When those animals contaminate the water with their stool, people can get sick if they drink or swim in the water.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

It is unknown exactly how long a person is able to spread the disease, because infected people who are untreated can carry the parasites in their stool.

How is a person diagnosed?

The laboratory will look at a sample of stool with a microscope to see if there are any *Giardia* parasites in it. This is the most common way of finding out if someone has giardiasis. *Giardia* can also be diagnosed by a laboratory test of a sample of fluid or a biopsy from the small intestine.

What is the treatment?

Several medicines are used to treat *Giardia* infection. They are only available by prescription from your physician. Other treatments for diarrhea, such as drinking more fluids, also may be recommended by your physician.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have giardiasis?

Exclude any child or adult with diarrhea from school or day care until the diarrhea has ceased.

Workers at food-related businesses, schools, residential programs, day-care and health-care facilities who feed, give mouth care or dispense medications to clients who have giardiasis must stay out of work until they no longer have diarrhea.

What can be done to prevent the spread of giardiasis disease?

Giardiasis can be prevented by practicing good hygiene and by using caution before drinking water from an unknown source.

Additional Information:

For additional information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. [chapter title]. In: Pickering LK, ed. Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[123-127].
Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 18th Edition-2004, Heymann, David, MD ed.

